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Representative Patricia Lantz

Update from Olympia

26th Legislative District



Winter 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Greetings and Happy New Year! By the time you receive this newsletter, the 2008 legislative session will be underway in Olympia. This is a short, 60 day legislative session, but we have a full agenda and I am excited to continue serving you and our community.

In November, Governor Gregoire called a special one-day session to respond to the state Supreme Court's decision to overturn I-747, the statewide initiative passed in 2001 capping annual property tax increases at 1%. The outpouring of correspondence that I received led to the decision to have a joint property tax forum on January 12th with House Finance Chair, Ross Hunter. This forum, co-hosted with Rep. Seaquist and Sen. Kilmer, gave us the opportunity to answer your questions, hear your concerns, and let you get the information you needed from Representative Hunter, who is at the front line of policy decision making with regard to property taxes. I look forward to giving you periodic updates as to what we are doing to tackle this difficult issue.

As with every session, public safety and education are at the top of my priority list. With that in mind, you may have already heard about my unwavering resolve to get drunk drivers off our roads. The bill I am sponsoring, backed by the Governor, creates a sobriety checkpoint program in Washington State. A targeted checkpoint program would both detect and deter those driving under the influence of alcohol. Washington is one of only 11 states that does not use this tool to prevent drunk-driving accidents. This piece of legislation will be one more tool we can use to make our roads safe for everyone.

And finally, our schools are one of the most precious resources we have to making our communities healthy, sustainable, and economically viable. As outlined on the inside pages, my championship of adequate school funding and focus on civics education has yielded recognition by State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Terry Bergeson. For the last 11 years, I have fought vigorously to improve our educational system statewide and in our district; I will do just that again this session.

Please join us at an upcoming community town hall meeting on February 23. More information will be coming shortly. I sincerely enjoy hearing from you about your issues, concerns, and ideas to make our community a better place for everyone. Please do not hesitate to contact me about any legislative issue concerning you. My door is always open.

Thank you for the honor of serving as your elected representative,

Patricia Lantz

Committees: Judiciary (Chair)
Agriculture & Natural Resources
Appropriations Subcommittee on
General Government & Audit Review

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MAKING OUR ROADS SAFER



On Christmas Eve, one person was killed when a car sped through a stop sign in Pierce County, triggering a collision. The driver of the car that caused the crash was suspected of being alcohol-impaired at the time this newsletter went to print.

Unfortunately, alcohol-related crashes resulting in injuries and fatalities are not a rare occurrence in our state. Between 1993 and 2003, a total of 2821 people died in vehicle accidents in which at least one driver was alcohol-impaired. That's 39% of all Washington state traffic fatalities during that period.

Our drunk driving laws are some of the toughest in the nation, but our DUI-related fatality rate ranks in the middle of all 50 states. That means we need to do an even better job of catching impaired drivers and keeping them off the road.

I am working on two significant DUI-related bills that will go a long way toward improving the safety of our roads. One would create a sobriety checkpoint program. The other would create a new ignition interlock driver's license for those who have had their regular license suspended for DUI. These are methods other states have used to decrease DUI-related accidents, and studies have shown that they work. As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I will be overseeing hearings on these bills, both of which I support. The sobriety checkpoint bill is being requested by Governor Gregoire and I am the prime sponsor. I welcome your feedback on this extremely important health and public safety issue.



IMPROVING EDUCATION

Education continues to be one of my top priorities as a legislator. My efforts to integrate civics, arts, social studies and physical fitness into the established curriculum are paying off. I am excited to be collaborating with the League of Women Voters, the arts community, health and wellness advocates, and Terry Bergeson, Superintendent of Public Schools, to move forward with creating standards and implementing this aggressive goal. You can expect to hear more about these efforts in the coming months.

REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE

Responding to the tragic killings at Virginia Tech last spring, I have crafted legislation to support the ongoing efforts of law enforcement. My bill amends Washington's firearm statute to do two things:

bring us in line with federal regulations; and

require information to be reported on those who have been involuntarily committed to a mental health facility for 14 days or more, and those who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity.

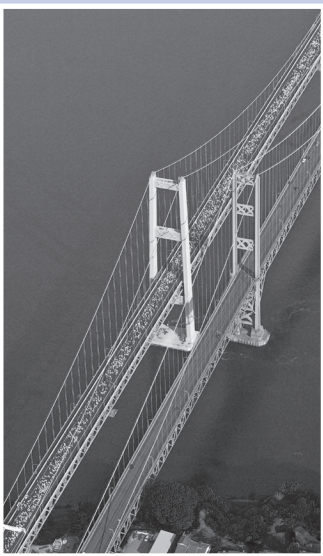
This legislation improves law enforcement's

access to data on persons prohibited from possessing firearms. I have strong support in this effort from the Governor's office, the Attorney General's office, law enforcement and the mental health community. Additionally, several newspapers across the state have already editorialized in favor of this legislation, with one calling it, "...a good move" (The Columbian) and another saying it provides, "...reasonable solutions that might lead to less gun violence and more accountability in the system for gun ownership and use." (The Olympian)

NEW NARROWS BRIDGE IMPROVES TRAFFIC FLOW

I had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of the new Narrows Bridge on July 16, 2007. This beautiful marvel of engineering carries four eastbound lanes of traffic towards Tacoma from the peninsula, including one HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lane. It also has a bicycle/pedestrian lane. Almost immediately after the bridge opened, the daily congestion normally seen on SR 16 eased in both directions. Traffic was flowing at highway speeds, as opposed to the frustrating stop-and-go experienced over the last several years.

The opening of the new bridge was not without controversy, however. First, there was considerable frustration voiced by motorists who had purchased a "Good To Go" pass in advance of the bridge's opening, only to find out that the state was granting an initial "grace period"



to drivers during which no one would be ticketed for not having the pass. Some felt this was unfair to those who had paid in advance. Then, news that tolls collected on the bridge were being used to fund services not directly related to the bridge's construction and maintenance resulted in a meeting between legislators of the 26th district and the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT). In August, I attended this meeting along with Rep. Seaquist and Sen. Kilmer to ensure that toll decisions were being made in the best interests of bridge commuters. I believe toll enforcement and incident response are important and legitimate uses for tolls, but it's important to keep an eye on exactly where the money is going. I also believe that citizen input on bridge operations is an important part of the ongoing dialogue.

On another Narrows Bridge-related topic, I hope this year to be able to secure funding for the Narrowsgate Park and Cushman bike trail extension at the end of the new bridge. PenMet Parks joined me last month in Olympia to outline the proposal for key decision makers.

NEW WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM COMMISSION



I am thrilled to have been appointed by the Speaker of the House to serve on the state Tourism Commission created last session by the legislature. In this role, I join representatives from the lodging industry, visitor and convention bureaus, food and wine industries, travel and transportations businesses and arts and entertainment organizations. The appointment gives me the opportunity to uniquely represent the heritage and cultural attractions of our West Sound region in the Commission's marketing and strategic planning process, which is intended to increase tourism dollars coming to our state.

Each year, Washington welcomes thousands of tourists, but of the 13 western states, we ranked last in tourism promotion spending. This was clearly an untapped economic resource. The 2007 legislature approved an overall increase of \$7.8 million over the next two years for the state tourism budget, which now places us solidly in the middle of our 13 Western neighbors and nationally in comparative spending.

Promoting cultural tourism and representing small communities are two areas I'm particularly excited about. There is strong evidence that cultural events, such as art fairs and music festivals, have a positive economic impact on small communities. The key is to draw tourists who are already visiting the state's more well-known attractions to these local cultural events, and that is one area I will be focusing on in my new role.